

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS (THIS LISTING REPLACES ALL PRIOR LISTINGS:

1. (Currently Amended) A method, comprising:

creating one or more clones of a first forum for user interaction, wherein the first forum is dedicated to a particular topic, and wherein each clone is an instance of the first forum, thereby allowing any number of users to be in the same forum dedicated to the particular topic while limiting the number of users in each instance of the first forum;

determining whether an interactive relationship exists between a first user entering the first forum and a second user ~~one or more other users~~ entering the first forum or ~~one or more other users~~ already in the first forum, wherein an interactive relationship is determined to exist if the first user and the second user have had an online interaction with each other prior to the first user entering the first forum; and

if an interactive relationship exists, placing the first user entering the first forum in a clone of the first forum based on the relationship.

2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving information from the first user entering the first forum indicating one or more other forums the first user has been in, wherein each other forum is dedicated to a topic different from that of the first forum;

receiving information from the second user ~~one or more other users~~ indicating one or more forums the second user ~~each of the other users~~ has been in, wherein each other forums the second user ~~each of the other users~~ has been in is dedicated to a topic different from that of the first forum; and

determining that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and the second user ~~another user~~ if the first user and the ~~other~~ second user both have been in the same second forum, the second forum being different from the first forum.

3. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving information associated with ~~from the~~ first user entering the first forum indicating what clones of what forums the first user has been in, wherein each of the forums the first user has been in is dedicated to a respective topic;

receiving information associated with the second user ~~from one or more other users~~ indicating what clones of what forums ~~each of the other users~~ the second user has been in, wherein each of the forums the second user ~~each of the other users~~ has been in is dedicated to a respective topic; and

determining that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and the second user ~~another user~~ if the first user and the ~~other~~ second user both have been in the same clone of a second forum, the second forum being different from the first forum.

4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 further comprising:

receiving information associated with ~~from the~~ first user entering the first forum indicating ~~the a~~ a domain name of the first user's address;

receiving information associated with ~~from one or more other users~~ the second user indicating ~~the a~~ a domain ~~names name~~ name of the ~~addresses~~ second user's address ~~of each of the other users~~; and

determining that a relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and the second ~~another~~ user if the first user entering the first forum and the ~~other~~ second user both have the same domain name.

5. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving information associated with ~~from the~~ first user entering the first forum indicating a country associated with the first user's address;

receiving information associated with the second user ~~from one or more other users~~ indicating a country associated with ~~each of the other~~ the second user's ~~addresses~~ address; and

determining that a relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and the second ~~another~~ user if the country associated with the first user's address and the country

associated with the second user's address is ~~user entering the first forum and the other user both have addresses associated with the same country.~~

6. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising:
receiving information associated with ~~from the~~ first user entering the first forum
indicating a language in which the first user prefers to communicate;
receiving information ~~from one or more other users~~ associated with the second user
indicating a language in which ~~each of the other users~~ the second user prefers to communicate;
and
determining that a relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and
~~the second~~ another user if the first user entering the first forum and the ~~second~~ other user prefer to
communicate in the same language.

7. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising:
receiving an indication from the first user entering the first forum or from the second
~~user~~ one or more other users that a relationship exists between the first user entering the first
forum and ~~one or more other users~~ the second user.

8. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 7 wherein placing the first user in a
clone includes placing the first user in a clone other than a clone containing a designated user
with whom an interactive relationship exists.

9. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein placing the first user in a
clone includes placing the first user in a clone with another user with whom an interactive
relationship exists.

10. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein placing the first user in a
clone includes placing the user in the clone with another user with whom an interactive
relationship exists and who most recently entered the first forum.

11. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising limiting the number of users in each instance of the first forum to a maximum number.

12. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising:
limiting the number of users in each instance of the first forum to a threshold number, except if an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and one or more other users; and
placing the first user entering the first forum in a clone with more than the threshold number of users only if an interactive relationship exists between the first user and one or more of the other users in the clone or entering the clone.

13. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 12, further comprising:
receiving information ~~from~~ associated with the first user entering the first forum indicating what clones of what forums the first user has been in;
receiving information associated with each of the ~~from~~ one or more other users indicating what clones of what forums each of the other users has been in; and
determining that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and another user if the first user and the other user both have been in the same clone of the same forum.

14. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the first forum comprises an interactive forum maintained by a system of one or more computers in which users interact by submitting messages and reading messages from other users as they are submitted.

15. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the first forum comprises an interactive virtual world maintained by a system of one or more computers where users interact by moving avatars, each user having one or more avatars in the virtual world, and observing the movement of the avatars in the virtual world.

16. (Currently Amended) A computer system comprising:
means for sending and receiving content to and from a network;
means coupled to means for sending and receiving content for creating one or more clones of a first forum for user interaction, wherein the first forum is dedicated to a particular topic, and wherein each clone is an instance of the first forum, thereby allowing any number of users to be in the same forum dedicated to the particular topic while limiting the number of users in each instance of the first forum; and

means coupled to means for sending and receiving content for determining whether an interactive relationship exists between a first user entering the first forum and a second user ~~one or more other users~~ entering the first forum or ~~one or more other users~~ already in the first forum, wherein an interactive relationship is determined to exist if the first user and the second user have had an online interaction with each other prior to the first user entering the first forum, and, if an interactive relationship exists, placing the first user entering the first forum in a clone of the first forum based on the relationship.

17. (Currently Amended) The computer system of claim 16, further comprising:
means for receiving information ~~from~~ associated with the first user entering the first forum indicating one or more other forums the first user has been in, wherein each other forum is dedicated to a topic different from that of the first forum;

means for receiving information ~~from~~ associated with the second user ~~one or more other users~~ indicating one or more forums ~~each of the other users~~ the second user has been in, wherein each other forums the second user ~~each of the other users~~ has been in is dedicated to a topic different from that of the first forum; and

means for determining that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and the second ~~another~~ user if the first user and the ~~other~~ second user both have been in the same second forum, the second forum being different from the first forum the user is entering.

18. (Currently Amended) The computer system of claim 16, further comprising means for receiving information ~~from associated with the~~ first user entering the first forum indicating what clones of what forums the first user has been in, wherein each of the forums the first user has been in is dedicated to a respective topic;

means for receiving information ~~from associated with the second user one or more other users~~ indicating what clones of what forums ~~each of the other users~~ the second user has been in, wherein each of the forums the ~~other users~~ second user has been in is dedicated to a respective topic; and

means for determining that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and ~~another~~ the second user if the first user and the ~~other~~ second user both have been in the same clone of a second forum, the second forum being different from the forum the user is entering.

19. (Currently Amended) The computer system of claim 16 further comprising: means for receiving information ~~from associated with the~~ first user entering the first forum indicating the domain name of the first user's address;

means for receiving information ~~from one or more other users~~ associated with the second user indicating the domain ~~names of the addresses of each of the other users~~ name of the second user's address; and

means for determining that a relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and ~~the second~~ another user if the first user entering the first forum and the ~~other~~ second user both have the same domain name.

20. (Currently Amended) The computer system of claim 16, further comprising: means for receiving information ~~from associated with the~~ first user entering the first forum indicating a country associated with the first user's address;

means for receiving information ~~from one or more other users~~ associated with the second user indicating a country associated with ~~each of the other second user's addresses~~ address; and

means for determining that a relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and ~~another~~second user if the first user entering the first forum and the ~~other~~second user both have addresses associated with the same country.

21. (Currently Amended) The computer system of claim 16, further comprising:
means for receiving information ~~from~~ associated with the first user entering the first forum indicating a language in which the first user prefers to communicate;

means for receiving information associated with the second user ~~from one or more other~~ users indicating a language in which the second user ~~each of the other users~~ prefers to communicate; and

means for determining that a relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and ~~another~~ the second user if the first user entering the first forum and the ~~other~~ second user prefer to communicate in the same language.

22. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 16, further comprising means for receiving an indication from the first user entering the first forum or from one or more other users that a relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and one or more other users.

23. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 22 wherein placing the first user in a clone includes placing the first user in a clone other than a clone containing a designated user with whom an interactive relationship exists.

24. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 16 wherein placing the first user in a clone includes placing the first user in a clone with another user with whom an interactive relationship exists.

25. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 16 wherein placing the first user in a clone includes placing the first user in the clone with another user with whom an interactive relationship exists and who most recently entered the first forum.

26. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 16, further comprising means for limiting the number of users in each instance of the first forum to a maximum number.

27. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 16, further comprising:
means for limiting the number of users in each instance of the first forum to a threshold number, except if an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and one or more other users; and

means for placing the first user entering the first forum in a clone with more than the threshold number of users only if an interactive relationship exists between the first user and one or more of the other users in the clone or entering the clone.

28. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 27, further comprising:
means for receiving information ~~from~~ associated with the first user entering the first forum indicating what clones of what forums the first user has been in;
means for receiving information from the second user ~~one or more other users~~ indicating what clones of what forums the second user ~~each of the other users~~ has been in; and
means for determining that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first forum and ~~another~~ the second user if the first user and the ~~other~~ second user both have been in the same clone of the same forum.

29. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 16 wherein the first forum comprises an interactive forum maintained by a system of one of more computers in which users interact by submitting messages and reading messages from other users as they are submitted.

30. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 16 wherein the first forum comprises an interactive virtual world maintained by a system of one or more computers where users interact by moving avatars, each user having one or more avatars in the virtual world, and observing the movement of the avatars in the virtual world.

31. (Currently Amended) A method, comprising:

creating one or more clones of a forum for user interaction, wherein each clone is an instance of the forum, thereby allowing any number of users to be in the same forum while limiting the number of users in each ~~instance~~ clone of the forum;

determining whether an interactive relationship exists between a first user entering the forum and a second user ~~one or more other users~~ entering the forum or ~~one or more other users~~ already in the forum, wherein an interactive relationship is determined to exist if the first user and the second user have had an online interaction with each other prior to the first user entering the first forum; and

if an interactive relationship exists, placing the first user entering the forum in a clone of the forum based on the relationship;

limiting the number of users in each instance of the forum to a threshold number, except if an interactive relationship exists between the first user ~~entering the forum and one or more other users~~ the second user; and

placing the first user entering the forum in a clone with more than the threshold number of users only if an interactive relationship exists between the first user and the second user ~~one or more of the other users in the clone or entering the clone~~.

32. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 31, further comprising:

receiving information associated with ~~from the~~ first user entering the forum indicating what clones of what forums the first user has been in;

receiving information associated with the second user ~~from one or more other users~~ indicating what clones of what forums ~~each of the other users~~ the second user has been in; and

determining that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the forum and the second ~~another~~ user if the first user and the ~~other~~ second user both have been in the same clone of a forum.

33. (Currently Amended) A computer system comprising:

means for sending and receiving content to and from a network;

means coupled to means for sending and receiving content for creating one or more clones of a forum for user interaction, wherein each clone is an instance of the forum, thereby allowing any number of users to be in the same forum while limiting the number of users in each instance of the forum;

means coupled to means for sending and receiving content for determining whether an interactive relationship exists between a first user entering the forum and a second user ~~one or more other users~~ entering the forum or ~~one or more other users~~ already in the forum, wherein an interactive relationship is determined to exist if the first user and the second user have had an online interaction with each other prior to the first user entering the forum, and, if an interactive relationship exists, placing the first user entering the forum in a clone of the forum based on the relationship;

means for limiting the number of users in each ~~instance~~ clone of the forum to a threshold number, except if an interactive relationship exists between the first user ~~entering the forum~~ and ~~one or more other users~~ the second user; and

means for placing the first user entering the forum in a clone with more than the threshold number of users only if an interactive relationship exists between the first user and the second user ~~one or more of the other users in the clone or entering the clone~~.

34. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 33, further comprising:

means for receiving information ~~from~~ associated with the first user entering the forum indicating what clones of what forums the first user has been in;

means for receiving information ~~from~~ associated with the second user ~~one or more other users~~ indicating what clones of what forums ~~each of the other users~~ the second user has been in; and

means for determining that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the forum and ~~another~~ the second user if the first user and the ~~other~~ second user both have been in the same clone of a forum.

35. (Currently Amended) A method, comprising:

creating a first world and a distinct second world, wherein each world is a distinct 3D virtual world that presents a 3D graphical scene to users, and wherein multiple users may enter and navigate each 3D virtual world and may interact by moving avatars, interacting and observing the world and other users;

creating two or more clones of the first world and two or more clones of the second world, wherein each clone is an instance of the respective world, allowing any number of users to be in the same world while limiting the number of users in each clone of the world;

receiving information ~~from~~ associated with a first user entering the first world indicating what clones of what distinct worlds the first user has been in;

receiving information ~~from one or more other users~~ associated with a second user indicating what clones of what distinct worlds ~~each of the other users~~ the second user has been in; and

determining that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first world and ~~another the second user~~, wherein an interactive relationship is determined to exist if the first user and the other second user have had an interaction with each other both have been in the same clone of the same world prior to the first user entering the first world; and

if an interactive relationship exists, placing the first user entering the first world in a clone of the first world based on the relationship.

36. (Currently Amended) A system, comprising:

means for creating a first world and a distinct second world, wherein each world is a distinct 3D virtual world that presents a 3D graphical scene to users, and wherein multiple users may enter and navigate each 3D virtual world and may interact by moving avatars, interacting and observing the world and other users;

means for creating two or more clones of the first world and two or more clones of the second world, wherein each clone is an instance of the respective world, allowing any number of users to be in the same world while limiting the number of users in each clone of the world;

means for receiving information ~~from~~ associated with a first user entering the first world indicating what clones of what distinct worlds the first user has been in;

means for receiving information ~~from~~ associated with a second user ~~one or more other users~~ indicating what clones of what distinct worlds ~~each of the other users~~ the second user has been in; and

means for determining that an interactive relationship exists between the first user entering the first world and ~~another~~ the second user, wherein an interactive relationship is determined to exist if the first user and the ~~other~~ second user have had an interaction with each other ~~both have been~~ in the same clone of the same world prior to the first user entering the first world; and

means for placing the first user entering the first world, if an interactive relationship exists, in a clone of the first world based on the relationship.

37. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1:

wherein the interactive relationship is a group membership relationship;

the method further comprising receiving an indication from the first user entering the forum or from one or more other users that a group membership relationship exists between the first user entering the forum and the one or more other users.

38. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 36:

wherein the interactive relationship is a group membership relationship;

the system further comprising means for receiving an indication from the first user entering the forum or from one or more other users that a group membership relationship exists between the first user entering the forum and the one or more other users.

39. (New) A computer program product, embodied on a computer-readable storage medium, including instructions operable to cause data processing apparatus to:

create one or more clones of a first forum for user interaction, wherein the first forum is dedicated to a particular topic, and wherein each clone is an instance of the first forum, thereby allowing any number of users to be in the same forum dedicated to the particular topic while limiting the number of users in each instance of the first forum;

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determine whether an interactive relationship exists between a first user entering the first forum and a second user entering the first forum or already in the first forum, wherein an interactive relationship is determined to exist if the first user and the second user have had an online interaction with each other prior to the first user entering the first forum; and

if an interactive relationship exists, place the first user entering the first forum in a clone of the first forum based on the relationship.